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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 000129

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [KDEM](#) [IS](#) [EG](#) [VE](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: GAZA PROTESTS CONTINUE IN JORDAN, CALLS FOR
BOYCOTTS OF AMERICAN GOODS

REF: A. AMMAN 113 (NOTAL)
[1](#)B. AMMAN 74

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Protests over events in Gaza continue, with the Israeli and Egyptian Embassies as the primary target of demonstrators. Calls for a boycott of Israeli and American goods are mounting, but there is little evidence that they will have any real impact. The call for a vote of no-confidence in parliament has sparked divisions within a key political bloc. INR-sponsored focus group participants voiced uniform support for Hamas. End Summary.

Protests Continue

[1](#)2. (U) On January 13, hundreds of students gathered for sit-ins at Starbucks branches throughout Amman, chanting slogans against supposed links between Starbucks and Israel (including "your coffee is full of blood"). The Alshaya Corporation, which controls Starbucks franchises in Jordan and the rest of the Middle East, responded with flyers at many locations which stated: "it is alleged that Starbucks and its senior management actively support Israel. This allegation is unequivocally not true." Protesters also returned to the Israeli Embassy, the site of ongoing demonstrations, some of which were dispersed with tear gas during the week of January 8. On January 13, protesters also burned pictures depicting Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak with a star of David on his forehead and called for the opening of the Rafah border crossing. During the protest, IAF leader Zaki Beni-Irshaid told reporters that "Egypt is required to exert a real effort - one that is within its power - to stop the aggression on Gaza, open the Rafah border crossing, and expel the Zionist ambassador." Egyptian PolCouns Shady Al-Sharkawi suggested in a message to PolChief that the demonstrations were "not as big or tough as they appear on the news" and that the embassy staff had "gotten used to" the steady stream of protests.

Boycott Calls Intensify

[1](#)3. (C) Islamist-linked trade unions, political parties, and NGOs are calling for a consumer boycott of Israeli and American goods. Islamist and anti-normalization groups in Jordan frequently call for boycotts, but their impact is often small or non-existent. Recent examples of half-hearted actions include a boycott of Danish dairy products following the publishing of cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed and a boycott of Dutch goods followed the release of a film critical of Islam by Dutch MP Geert Wilders. Badi Al-Rafayah, head of the Trade Unionist Committee for Resisting Normalization, equated the current boycott of American goods with "refusing to submit to the occupiers' will." Union members are scheduled to unfurl on January 14 a large banner in the popular Sweifieh shopping district, home to many emboffs, and pass out leaflets urging a boycott of

American and Israeli goods. American Chamber of Commerce CEO Mustafa Mustafa told poloff that the boycott would "not be effective in the long term" but that he has heard grumblings from businesses linked to the U.S. over the past several days. For example, the company managing outlets of Burger King, Fuddruckers, and Popeyes reported to FAS LES a 25% decrease in sales, and McDonald's reports a decline of 30%.

Repercussions in Parliament

14. (U) Internet news site Ammon News reported on January 14 that MP Tareq Khoury's call for a no-confidence vote in the government of PM Nader Dahabi was making waves in Jordan's parliament (Ref A). Members of Khoury's parliamentary grouping, the normally progressive and business-oriented National Fraternal Bloc (Ikha'), are apparently split over whether to back Khoury's efforts or repudiate them. On January 12, Ikha' members received a text message calling for an emergency meeting to discuss the bloc's stance on Gaza, but the meeting was later postponed to let passions cool in the wake of Khoury's statement. Some members of the bloc are upset that Khoury failed to consult his colleagues in the bloc before issuing his statement, while others sympathize with his call for a no-confidence vote.

15. (U) A group of MPs visited the Venezuelan Embassy on January 13 to express their appreciation for the expulsion of the Israeli Ambassador. This follows a similar visit by members of the Islamist-led Higher Coordinating Council of National Opposition Parties to the Venezuelan Embassy during

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the week of January 8, in which they presented Venezuelan diplomats with bouquets and laid wreaths of flowers at the embassy gates.

Further Reaction

16. (C) Observers here are speculating now on effects of Gaza events on the peace process. Oraib Rantawi, Director of the Al-Quds Center for Political Studies, asserted to poloff on January 12 that the King and Royal Court believe that Israel's Gaza operation is the beginning of the end for a two-state solution. Rantawi assessed that when the King spoke publicly of an international conspiracy against the Palestinians, his unstated meaning was that there was a conspiracy against Jordan (Ref A). Indeed, after Rantawi offered this analysis in an Al-Dustour column, the Royal Court called him up to thank him directly for drawing that conclusion.

17. (C) Recent events dominated a January 14 INR-sponsored focus group session on food security, in which participants declared Gaza the primary topic of conversation in Jordan and the region. The group uniformly portrayed the incursion as an act of aggression on Israel's part (as opposed to legitimate self-defense on the part of Hamas). One woman wondered aloud, "why can't the United States judge Israel in the way that they judged Saddam?" Another voiced support for Venezuela's expulsion of the Israeli Ambassador. Participants were skeptical about the ability of the President-Elect to change American policy, commenting that "the new one already has the policies of the old one." They interpreted what they consider to be Mr. Obama's relative silence on the issue as tacit support for Israel's action and a sign that America's perceived pro-Israel stance would continue.

Beecroft